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AUTHOR Huydic, Valerie
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ABSTRACT

The "Direct Instructional System for Teaching Reading" (DISTAR) is a highly structured, synthetic method of teaching reading that was developed to provide beginning and remedial reading instruction to primary school children who have had difficulty learning from other materials. To determine DISTAR's effectiveness as a teaching method, the 77 Bridgeport, Connecticut, teachers who used DISTAR were asked to complete an evaluative questionnaire. The responses from the 58 teachers completing the questionnaire were analyzed and compared to similar surveys of Chicago teachers using DISTAR. A summary of the findings showed that the Bridgeport teachers and their students liked using DISTAR, that DISTAR taught word attack skills better than it taught comprehension skills, that a teacher aide was necessary when using DISTAR, that DISTAR was an effective teaching method for all types of learners (especially slow and average learners), and that DISTAR enhanced attention span without stifling student creativity. The teachers expressed the need to improve DISTAR in several ways, including greater emphasis on comprehension skills, the addition of supplementary materials, and the revision of one of the DISTAR programs (DISTAR III). (A copy of the questionnaire is attached.) (RL)

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Author: Valerie Huydic

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Acknowledgements	ii
INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem	1
Significance of the Problem and Summary	3
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	3
Related Research on Teachers' Opinions of Distar	9
PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY AND DESIGN	12
PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS ON TEACHERS' EVALUATION OF DISTAR READING	12
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	19
Restatement of Problems	19
Major Findings	19
Conclusions	21
Recommendations for Further Investigation	24
FOOTNOTES	26
BIBLIOGRAPHY	28
APPENDIX	30

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INTRODUCTION

Distar is the "Direct Instructional System for Teaching Reading." Distar was developed and initiated by Siegfried Engelmann and Carl Bereiter in 1964 and published by Science Research Associates in 1967. The program was designed to provide beginning and remedial reading instruction to preschool and primary children who have traditionally had difficulty learning from other materials.

Distar is comprised of Distar Reading 1, 11, and 111, plus Distar Language. There is also Distar Mathematics. This paper is concerned only with Distar Reading.

Distar is a highly structured, systematic program. Because of heavy emphasis on structure, programmed learning, drill, and repetition, some educators oppose the use of the Distar method.

Statement of the Problem

This paper delves into previous studies reporting the effectiveness of Distar. The main emphasis, however, is on teachers' evaluation of Distar Reading. It mentions how Chicago teachers evaluated Distar, but my primary concern is how Bridgeport, Connecticut, teachers' evaluated Distar Reading.

Opponents of Distar argue that teachers and pupils are programmed, thus stifling creativity. The Teacher's Guide to Distar Reading 1 states that the concept underlying Distar is that virtually all children can learn if we teach them carefully. In order to do this, the teacher must do what is required, as outlined by Engelmann and Bereiter, if she/he is to ensure that the children master each skill. The authors believe this attention to detail is vital. The Teacher's Guide lists probable mistakes teachers might make, tells them how to group, how to test before grouping and during the entire program, even how to point. There are workbooks called "Take-Home Books" provided for each child. The "Take-Home" activities give the children practice on tasks related to the

skills they are learning in the teacher presentation of reading and reading skills. They provide skill-building seatwork, teach workbook and test-taking skills, and promote greater independence.

Standard orthography is not used exclusively in the first half of the Distar Reading Program. No capital letters are used and alphabet letters are not stressed at first. Letters are referred to by their corresponding sounds. Also, hand signals are very important.

Distar places much emphasis on phonic analysis which involves the association of letters with the speech sounds they represent. The synthetic method and the analytic method are two basic methods of teaching children to make and use these associations in analyzing words. The analytic method begins with words that children are already familiar with, either orally or at sight. Children are taught to hear sounds as they appear in words and to note how words are similar and different. This method stresses learning sounds within words.

The synthetic method is one in which children are taught the sounds of individual letters and then shown how to combine those sounds to form words. Objections to the synthetic phonics program are: (1.) Undue emphasis is placed on phonics as a means of identifying words; (2.) Children don't have the opportunity to combine context and phonics clues when individual sounds are treated; (3.) Letter sounds, particularly consonants, become distorted when they are pronounced separately; (4.) Isolated sounds are meaningless to children, who must depend on rote learning to master them. (1)

Distar would be considered a synthetic method for teaching phonics. The purpose of this paper is to discover if Bridgeport, Connecticut, teachers believe this highly programmed, synthetic method is an effective method of teaching reading. Distar in Bridgeport is used mainly with socially disadvantaged, inner-city Bridgeport minority

children. I would also like to know if the teachers believe it is stifling creativity. I am also interested in affective attitudes concerning Distar Reading, such as the teachers' like or dislike for it and humanistic attitudes toward it.

To discover these things, I distributed questionnaires to seventy-seven teachers in nine schools using Distar in Bridgeport, Connecticut. This includes all of the teachers and schools using the Distar Reading method. There are one hundred teachers using Distar in Bridgeport but some of them teach only Distar Language. I am concerned in this report with teachers who teach Distar Reading. I asked every teacher who teaches Distar Reading in grades one, two, or three to complete the questionnaire. Fifty-eight (75 percent) of the Distar Reading teachers returned the completed questionnaires.

I even received seven questionnaires completed by Distar Language teachers in prekindergarten and kindergarten who desired to answer the questions. It is obvious that teachers were very cooperative and anxious to state their opinions on the teaching of Distar Reading. One of the principals said she believed this was so because the teachers have very positive attitudes toward Distar.

Significance of the Problem and Summary

It is important first to discuss the effectiveness of the Distar Reading method to see if research has indicated whether Distar is a suitable method of teaching reading, worthy enough to be used in schools. Also, it would be helpful to learn if it is more effective with certain types of learners.

I think it is important to learn how Bridgeport Distar Reading teachers assess the program since most of the information of this kind is based on Chicago teachers' opinions. We need a more national perspective, I believe.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In the first place, not enough studies

have been conducted comparing Distar to other methods for more than one year of use. To form an adequate appraisal, the use of Distar from kindergarten through third grade with one group of children should be investigated more thoroughly. Unfortunately, this is difficult to do because of the transience of our society, especially in the inner-city. Children frequently move from one school to another. Because of this fact, Bridgeport has, beginning September 1978, standardized all reading textbooks in the city that are used in classes not using Distar.

In my analysis of research, I will begin with research done in the kindergarten or first grade using Distar Language since readiness is highly correlated with success in reading.

Ogletree (2) completed a study on 258 Chicago inner-city, predominately black, kindergarten children comparing scores in reading of 64 Distar pupils with scores of 191 pupils being taught by the Eclectic Readiness Program, which employed a variety of teaching methods such as phonetic, look-say, and kinesthetic. It is necessary to note that the Distar children were taught in classes of twelve to fifteen pupils, with the help of teacher aides and auxiliary services. Engelmann and Bereiter maintain that small groups are important because the teacher must watch each child closely. Also, because small groups are desirable, an aide is very helpful to effective teaching. The Eclectic classes contained twenty-five to thirty children with no teacher aides or auxiliary services. It is only at the kindergarten level that two reading programs are used in Chicago. All other grade levels use Distar exclusively. This is one reason I presume why much of the research is based on Chicago's use of Distar. The findings of this study show that the children in the Eclectic Readiness Program achieved significantly higher mean language readiness scores than did the Distar pupils. It should be noted that the staff favored Distar. Ogletree concludes that on the basis of the results, the Eclectic approach was significantly more effective than the Distar approach.

Engelmann [3] responded to this study by protesting the methodology used by Ogletree. For example, he resents the fact that no pretest data on the children was provided. He raises many other issues on which he disagrees with Ogletree.

Merle Gordon [4] summarized twenty-one case studies using Distar. Several studies compared children who participated in a traditional kindergarten program with those in a kindergarten using Distar. Results showed that children in the Distar program attained greater reading achievement. A comparison of reading achievement of first graders after two years of Distar Reading and Language and first graders taught with another instructional system favored the Distar group. Gordon summarized in his study that the achievement of first graders using Distar was significantly greater than the achievement of first graders the previous year who used basal texts.

Four of the studies conducted by Hanchett, [5] Knudsen, [6] Anderson, [7] and Aronson [8] found Distar equal to or a more effective reading program than other methods of teaching preschool and primary reading. Another case study conducted by Gross [9] found that Distar enhanced the attention span of children.

Juliet Borden [10] evaluated the effectiveness of a Head Start program utilizing Distar on seventy-seven rural disadvantaged children. Test scores were analyzed for students participating in either a one year language oriented or two year reading and language oriented Head Start program. At the end of second grade in a behaviorally structured Distar program, children from the two year program scored significantly higher than a control group or than students in the one year program in reading and spelling achievement scores.

Kaufman [11] compared Distar instruction to conventional (basal reader, informal language) instruction when initiated in the first grade. Two experiments were conducted in

a Massachusetts community. The achievement of twenty Distar and nineteen control subjects was monitored through third grade. The results were as follows: the Distar group was able to make a satisfactory transition to conventional instruction in grade three, but they achieved neither better or worse than control subjects at that time; the groups were equivalent in initial readiness and I Q when in second grade; no differences between the groups were significant at the end of first, second, or third grade.

At the end of the third grade, forty-one Distar pupils and thirteen control pupils were compared. No differences appeared between School A Distar group and the control group at the end of experiment two, but the control group was superior to the School B Distar group in word meaning and paragraph meaning. I wonder if the Distar pupils had been allowed to finish with Distar 111 rather than being put in a conventional classroom in grade three if their meaning or comprehension scores would have been lower since the greatest comprehension emphasis in Distar Reading is in Distar 111? In this study, it was concluded that Distar pupils may perform as well as pupils in the conventional programs, but not better over the long run. One should also note that we are not told the social or economic background of these children.

With reference to socio-economic status and its relation to Distar, Bruton (12) evaluated the objectives of the Distar Language 1 program based on a sample consisting of three first grade classes in Oregon, one lower class (disadvantaged), one lower-middle class, and the other upper-middle class. The class status of the schools was identified largely on the basis of neighborhood prestige, stability of the school population, and the number of low-income children enrolled in the school. The results indicated much less difference between groups than was expected. A similar set of objectives and a similar plan for organizing instruction could be used in each of the three classroom groups regardless of the socio-economic

status, Bruton concluded. The "advantaged-disadvantaged" notion of group-need can thus be seen as misleading as a basis for planning oral-language instruction.

The stifling of creativity is an accusation some opponents express about Distar. Ryckman, Mc Cartin, and Sebesta (13) compared Distar Reading and the Lippincott Basic Readers. The major difference between the two programs lies in the degree of control the teacher exerts over presentation, pupils' responses, and reinforcement. One-hundred and thirty six urban kindergarten and first grade children from widely ranging socio-economic backgrounds were compared. The results of this study indicated that a highly structured, teacher-controlled program (Distar) does not have negative effects on the creativity of the pupils. Tests were used to measure divergent production. Questions such as the following were asked: the child must respond with as many different completions as possible to the stimulus phrase, "In the _____." In another, the examiner asked the child to give as many examples as possible to such leads as, "What sleeps?"

A comparative five year study, initiated in the spring of 1967, of different approaches to teaching economically disadvantaged children in primary grades conducted for the U.S. Office of Education by Abt Associates Inc. of Cambridge, Massachusettes, costing the government 500 million dollars, evaluated 9,256 children from kindergarten through third grade at 116 schools nationwide. The children were part of Project Follow Through, an extension of the Head Start program, which gives low-income children in elementary grades an opportunity to catch up with their middle-class peers. School districts were awarded grants by the Office of Education and were given a choice of eleven available "sponsored programs." These specific educational improvement models were implemented in various school settings. Distar was the program sponsored by the University

of Oregon which used Distar in twenty Follow Through communities. Many approaches were investigated such as the highly regimented formal classroom, open classroom, and an approach in which the parents taught their children at home. The report concluded that children from low-income families perform better in academic skills in programs that emphasized structure and basic skills. They found that only two of the experiments, both highly formal, have significantly improved pupil performance. Distar was the most successful. Disadvantaged third-graders in Distar classrooms achieved scores in reading that were nearly as high as the national norms. The Direct Instruction Model (Distar) surpassed all other sponsors by over one-half standard deviation in total reading as measured by the Metropolitan Achievement Test. It was also the only approach to show achievement above the 3.0 grade level. (14)

I believe the U.S. government should sponsor more research such as this. This one study is not enough to make broad generalizations since all models had successes and failures. Emrick et al., who evaluated the effectiveness of the national Follow Through program, suggested problems in evaluation and program objectives. (15) Although this recent research project is helpful, more of this longitudinal research is necessary so we can compare several types of teaching methods being taught to all kinds of learners in different socio-economic areas.

Distar has proved successful with learning disabled and retarded children, according to the limited research in this field. Guinet(16) has stated that Distar has been successful with disadvantaged and retarded children with learning disabilities. In two Urbana, Illinios, classes of retarded children (including, as is customary, a number of children who were not actually retarded but simply too disruptive to remain in regular classrooms), I Q's rose so markedly that in a single year more children were graduated from the retarded to the normal class than had been so promoted over the previous five years (Parents' Magazine, February 1972).

To determine the most effective language training activities for trainable mentally retarded children, the variables of degree of previous language training, I Q, Peabody language treatment program versus Distar language treatment program, pretest versus posttest, and sex were examined with 122 trainable mentally retarded children, ages seven to fourteen. The results indicated children were significantly better aided by the Distar program than by the Peabody program.(17)

Distar has also helped children with language problems. A school with a large enrollment of Indian children, all of whom had automatically been kept in first grade for two years because of language problems, was able to promote first graders to second grade after just one year with Distar (Parents' Magazine, February 1972).

Bridgeport uses Distar Reading in bilingual classes. One teacher commented:

> Children reading solely in Spanish can greatly benefit from the readiness skills in Distar 1.

I think the research indicates that Distar can be effective for some pupils and certainly deserves a place in the teaching of reading and language. There is not one method that is suitable for all children. Very little research concludes that Distar is less effective than other methods of teaching reading to some children. The method(s) chosen to be used with students should be based on careful diagnosis and individual needs.

Related Research On Teachers' Opinions of Distar

Most of the aforementioned studies evaluated the effectiveness of Distar in teaching children to read. Four studies to be discussed evaluated Chicago teachers' opinions of Distar. I believe it is necessary to have this type of evaluative information because an important factor in a method's success is teachers' reactions to the method. It helps if teachers like and believe in what they are teaching. Distar depends so heavily on teachers' enthusiasm, reactions (re-

ward and praise are extremely important, teachers' negative feelings are discouraged), and methodology (a highly structured sequence of lessons that gives the teacher a script to follow). It was found in the U.S. Office of Education's Project Follow Through study that even Distar had successes and failures, as did each of the approaches. Andy Anderson, Project director, said that the teacher and the implementation of the program bear on the success of a program more than does the philosophy of the approach. (18)

Ogletree and Dispasalegne(19)(1975) conducted a study in Chicago to determine teachers' views of Distar as a reading program for inner-city children. All of the twenty-one primary grade teachers in one elementary school in Chicago completed a questionnaire. In general, the majority found the program effective and had positive opinions of Distar. The majority did not believe it was effective with all children (so said 76 percent), disliked the structured format, modified the program, and most believed the children were bored. Ninety-five percent of the teachers indicated the children achieved in reading at a normal rate, however. Most teachers felt confident teaching Distar Reading and believed it saved time in preparation.

Dipasalegne and Ogletree (1976)(20) conducted another larger assessment of Distar by Chicago teachers. One hundred and five randomly chosen primary teachers from eleven inner-city elementary schools located in predominantly black neighborhoods completed a questionnaire. The teachers thought the program was effective with most children, but especially with slow learners, and they reported the pupils liked the program. The majority (56 per cent) of the teachers modified the materials and presentation of the program to meet the needs of their own individual situations. Recommendations for improvement of the Distar program were made.

Ogletree and Ogletree(21) reported on the responses of seventy-two Chicago teachers who completed a questionnaire

on the effectiveness of Distar, their opinions toward Distar, and pupils' reaction to Distar. The majority (59 percent) believe Distar to be an effective reading program but also believed it to have disadvantages. They didn't believe it was effective with all children (so said 72 percent), most believed it was more suited to slow learners than average or rapid learners. Sixty-four percent liked teaching Distar, but didn't think it was superior to other reading programs, as did the teachers in the Ogletree and Dipasalegne study (1975). Both studies agreed that more emphasis should be placed on reading comprehension. Both studies also offered suggestions on how to improve Distar Reading.

With reference to pupils' reactions, both studies concluded that the majority of the students liked Distar. However, the Ogletree and Ogletree study reported that most students liked another reading method better than they did Distar. This would be hard for me to discover in my report since most students being taught by the Distar method in Bridgeport have only been taught by that method and have not been exposed to other methods. I have been told by teachers that students entering Distar Reading II or III who have not been taught Distar I have a difficult time adjusting. This might happen when children move from one school using a basal series to another school using Distar.

Maillis, (22) in his study, reported that the majority of teachers felt Distar to be effective with socially disadvantaged children. He concluded that the longer teachers taught Distar, the better they liked it.

All these studies agreed that teachers liked teaching Distar and that the children taught with Distar were learning the materials. In the Ogletree and Ogletree report, they stated that the teachers recognized Distar was not a panacea. I believe no single program or approach has provided a panacea for the problems of the disadvantaged, or for slow learners, or for any other group of children.

Low-income youngsters are not a homogeneous group. There is a wide range of individual differences in any group.

PROCEDURE OF THE STUDY AND DESIGN

Questionnaires were distributed to all available teachers using Distar Reading, as opposed to using a random sampling of teachers. Only Bridgeport teachers teaching Distar Reading for at least one year were asked to respond (77 teachers). Distar Reading was evaluated on the basis of its use with disadvantaged children in developmental programs, not retarded children, or children with severe learning disabilities, in nine schools in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

The teachers were given a fifty question objective questionnaire to complete. Forty-eight questions required a check (✓) under either yes, no, or no comment. In two questions the teachers were asked to underline the answer of their choice. There were introductory questions of a personal nature also, although all questions were completed anonymously. At the end, two separate open-ended questions allowed the teachers to add their own comments about the program if they desired. A cover page described the reason for the questionnaire and other pertinent information. All questionnaires were delivered personally to the nine principals who distributed them to the Distar teachers. One week later, they were picked up. Sixty-five teachers completed the questionnaires. Seven teachers had taught Distar Language, not Distar Reading, so I did not use their answers in this report. This report is based on the responses of fifty-eight Distar Reading teachers in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA OF FINDINGS ON TEACHERS' EVALUATION OF DISTAR READING

The teachers who completed the questionnaires in Bridgeport, Connecticut, were extremely experienced. Only seven teachers had taught school for less than five years. All of the rest, fifty-one teachers, had taught for more than five years. Of that number, twenty teachers had taught for fif-

teen years or more. Fifty-four teachers had taught reading by some other method. The majority, fifty-one teachers, had an aide. Sixty-six percent of the teachers indicated they thought an aide was necessary to the effective teaching of Distar Reading. Fifty-six teachers taught Distar Reading everyday. All of the teachers attended a workshop in preparation for teaching Distar.

Sixty-nine percent of the teachers did not teach Distar Math or Language. Forty-seven percent would like to use the Distar method to teach one or both of these subjects. This is in contrast to the Chicago teachers in one study. Ogletree and Ogletree reported that only 23 percent of those teachers would like to teach another subject using the Distar method.

Engelman and Bereiter claim that groups should be kept small when using Distar. Ninety-seven percent of the teachers had from six to ten children in a group. Sixty-nine percent had from four to eight reading groups.

Engelmann has stated there is a high correlation between achievement and the amount of engaged teaching time. Seventy-two percent of the teachers spent thirty to forty-five minutes per day per group. Only 12 percent were able to spend one hour or more per day per group in Distar Reading. The vast majority of teachers, 93 percent, felt they spent sufficient time with each group teaching Distar Reading. The Ogletree and Dipasalegne (1975) report indicated that most of the teachers in that study (71 percent) believed a thirty-minute period of Distar was a reasonable length of time.

The teachers who answered the following questions taught reading by some other method in the past. Thirty-three percent said that when they were teaching reading by some other method, not Distar, the children achieved just as well. The majority, 41 percent, said children achieved less well when using the other method. Two teachers (3

percent) said the children achieved more when using another method, other than Distar. Twenty-two percent would not comment. Sixty-six percent felt the children were more attentive when being taught by the Distar method. Sixty-four percent of the teachers liked teaching by the Distar method more than by some other method.

Of the fifty-eight teachers who taught Distar Reading, most, 83 percent, said they liked teaching Distar. As in the previous studies mentioned, most of the teachers, 81 percent, did not, however, believe it was superior to other reading programs for all children. Seventy-eight percent believed it was effective with some children. The majority, 57 percent, believed Distar could be used effectively in any classroom. The teachers did not, it should be noted, believe Distar was mainly for slow learners. Ninety-three percent believed it could be used effectively with average learners. Sixty-nine percent answered that Distar was effective with bright learners. These opinions are quite different from Ogletree and Ogletree's report since the teachers in Chicago did not believe Distar was as effective with average learners as with slow learners. Only 28 percent of Chicago teachers in this study believed Distar was effective with average learners. Only 29 percent of Chicago teachers believed it was effective with rapid or bright learners.

With reference to motivational aspects of Distar, 66 percent of the teachers believed it was just as motivational to slow learners as average learners. However, more teachers (47 versus 41 percent) believed it was not as motivational to bright learners as slow learners.

The great majority of teachers, 90 percent, believed culturally disadvantaged children need and like a structured, concrete approach to learning such as Distar. Most, 88 percent, believed Distar was successful with socially disadvantaged children. In most of the other studies, including Ogletree and Ogletree, Ogletree and Dipasalegne (1975), and

Maillus's, the majority of teachers believed Distar was effective with socially disadvantaged children.

Most Bridgeport teachers, 69 percent, didn't believe Distar was too structured. In the Dipasalegne and Ogletree study (1976), the majority of the teachers 62 percent, also did not feel the program was too structured, but in the Ogletree and Dipasalegne study (1975), the majority of the teachers (48 percent) felt Distar to be too structured.

Most of the Bridgeport teachers, 81 percent, believed Distar met the needs of children for whom learning to read might be especially difficult. When asked if Distar Reading should be used more as a remedial reading system, most teachers, 41 percent, answered negatively. Thirty-six percent responded in the affirmative. It is interesting to note that twenty-two percent would not comment on this. The other question on which many teachers would not comment, 26 percent, was concerned with whether they deviated from the program a lot. The majority, however, responded no (67 percent). The teachers were almost equally divided as to whether they deviated at all (50 percent, yes, and 45 percent, no). Most, 86 percent, did not modify or revise the program daily, although most, 62 percent, did modify or revise it occasionally. More teachers, fifteen, indicated they modified or revised hand signals. Twelve teachers modified or revised format, seven the materials, eight the "Take-homes". Obviously, not many teachers modified or revised any one of those things in overwhelming proportions. I would conclude from these figures that most teachers did adhere to the programmed instructions most of the time in Bridgeport.

The two studies (1975 and 1976) Ogletree and Dipasalegne conducted reported findings to the contrary. The majority did not adhere to the programmed instructions and in one study (1975), 85 percent of the teachers modified the program.

The majority, 66 percent, of Bridgeport teachers believed children's attention span was better with Distar Reading than

with other subjects. The great majority, 83 percent, claimed the attention span of children was not shorter when teaching Distar Reading than when teaching other subjects. It seems Distar does enhance the attention span of some students, as Gross's research related.

Chicago teachers in Ogletree and Ogletree's study reported the opposite. They indicated Distar did not increase the attention span of children. The great majority, 71 percent, agreed that it was shorter with Distar than with other subjects. In another question, only 25 percent found children's attention span to be better with Distar than with other subjects. In the Ogletree and Dipasalegne (1975) study, they found that teachers, 86 percent, believed the attention span of the children was equal for all subjects.

The Bridgeport teachers supported Maillus' claim that the longer teachers taught Distar, the better they liked it. Sixty-four percent of Bridgeport teachers answered affirmatively.

The teachers in all the studies, including mine, predominantly felt Distar saved time in preparation and felt confident using the method. The confidence of Bridgeport teachers may be due to the fact that most, 83 percent, believed they had adequate preparations so that they could teach Distar effectively. Bridgeport has a workshop for one week in the summer that all future Distar teachers must attend.

A little more than half (59 percent) used Distar Reading along with other reading programs, although more than three quarters of the teachers (79 percent) said they would like to do that. Even though the majority, 72 percent, maintained that they liked to teach Distar and would rather teach Distar Reading than another reading system, a greater majority, 74 percent, indicated they wanted the option of making that choice. The teachers in the Ogletree and Ogletree report responded almost exactly the same as to the option of choosing what system to teach. Seventy-three

percent said they wanted that option. Teachers, like everyone else, don't want to be forced into doing anything.

Some Chicago teachers differed from Bridgeport teachers' responses on their desire to teach Distar if they had the choice. In Ogletree and Ogletree's report, teachers were divided about using Distar (41 to 43 percent) if given the option. In the Ogletree and Dipasalegne (1975) report, about half, 48 percent, indicated that they would not use Distar if they had the option.

The Bridgeport teachers, 71 percent, did not think Distar was boring to teach. The majority, 62 percent, did not think it stifled their creativity. Sixty percent agreed with Ryckman, Mc Cartin, and Sebesta's findings that Distar doesn't stifle the children's creativity. However, one of the recommendations Dipasalegne and Ogletree (1976) submitted was that teachers and students should be able to express their own creativity in relationships to Distar. Obviously, some must feel their creativity was being suppressed.

Ninety-three percent of the Bridgeport teachers believed there was ample drill. A large majority, 83 percent, did supplement the written work provided by Distar. The written work appears in the form of "Take-homes." The majority of teachers, 67 percent, believed the "Take-homes" were effective as motivational devices. I would suspect that most of the teachers supplemented the comprehension skills since 59 percent of the teachers complained that Distar Reading doesn't teach enough comprehension skills. This was a common complaint in all of Ogletree's assessment studies. Fifty-two percent of the Bridgeport teachers also added that the Distar tests are not valid measures of reading comprehension. This was a complaint in Ogletree and Ogletree's report also.

On the other hand, most of the Bridgeport teachers, 78 percent, were convinced that most of the basic word attack skills were learned in Distar Reading and that the tests are valid measures of achievement of word attack skills (60

percent). The great majority, 93 percent, revealed that they believed Distar Reading was effective with their class. Most of the teachers, 55 percent, skipped lessons with some pupils, obviously the brighter ones.

Seventy-nine percent of the Bridgeport teachers felt the illustrations and story content were appealing to the children. Only fifty-one percent believed this in the Dipasalegne and Ogletree (1976) account and in the Ogletree and Dipasalegne (1975) study, 67 percent indicated the illustrations and story content could be made more realistic and humorous. Chicago teachers were not as pleased with this aspect of the books.

Since Distar is such a programmed, structured approach to reading, I was interested in its humanistic appeal. When I queried the teachers about this, I defined my view of what humanistic means to me. By humanistic I mean that the teacher does feel like she/he has communication with each student and is usually attuned to all of his needs, not just the educational ones. A little more than half (57 percent), said they could be just as humanistic when teaching Distar as when not using the Distar method. Twenty-four percent, however, did believe they could be more humanistic teaching in another manner, not using the Distar methodology. No other study explored this phase of Distar versus other methodologies. One teacher added this comment:

> I thoroughly enjoyed using the Distar method of reading. It allowed me to teach a variety of skills and allowed me to be humanistic at the same time.

As for pupils' feelings, practically the majority, 97 percent, of the teachers believed the pupils liked Distar. The other studies also reached this conclusion. This question in my study was the question the most teachers agreed upon. The Bridgeport teachers were divided as to whether slow learners liked Distar better than average learners (43 versus 47 percent). They were also divided as to whether

slow learners liked Distar better than bright students (50 versus 45 percent), although in this question slightly more answered affirmatively.

In this study it was found that most teachers, 78 percent, believed the children were not bored with the repetition. In the Dipasalegne and Ogletree (1976) study, the teachers were evenly divided (42 versus 41 percent) as to children's boredom with the repetition. However, in the Ogletree and Dipasalegne (1975) article it was stated that 72 percent of the teachers thought the children were bored. That is very close to the exact opposite of the Bridgeport teachers' opinion.

Fifty-five of the Bridgeport teachers indicated that they believed the children did not have difficulty making the transition from Distar print to regular print in reading, although a significant number, 34 percent, believed the children did have difficulty. Teachers were very concerned about this matter in the Dipasalegne and Ogletree (1976) account and commented:

> The children have trouble making the transition from Distar print to regular print in reading . . .

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Restatement of the Problems

An analysis of the research supports the claim that Distar is effective with some children. In only one study did I find that another method was significantly more effective with inner-city children than Distar. That was in Ogletree's study of Distar Language versus the Eclectic Readiness Program.

Research also indicates that Distar Reading can be effective with all types of children, slow, average, or bright learners, regardless of socio-economic status, and has even been effective with mentally retarded children and children with other learning problems, such as a language barrier.

Major Findings

With reference to the studies revealing teachers' opinions of Distar Reading, there are some points on which the

teachers are in agreement: (1.) Teachers like to teach Distar; (2.) Distar saves time in preparation; (3.) Distar Reading is limited in the area of comprehension; (4.) Pupils like Distar; (5.) Teachers would like the option of deciding whether they should teach Distar Reading to a particular group of pupils; (6.) Distar should not be used with all children, since it is believed not to be effective with all children; (7.) Distar could be used as a remedial program or in a developmental situation; (8.) Teachers believe Distar Reading is effective; (9.) Some teachers modify or revise the program in one form or another.

There was a disparity of agreement as to who is best suited to be taught by the Distar method. Ogletree and Ogletree and Maillis reported that teachers believed Distar was most effective with socially disadvantaged children. Dipasalegne and Ogletree (1976) reported that teachers thought it was most effective with slow learners. On the contrary, Ogletree and Dipasalegne (1975) reported that less than one-half of the teachers felt Distar to be effective with slow learners. The majority of Bridgeport teachers believed it was effective with children for whom learning to read might be especially difficult, for average learners, and even rapid learners and was successful with socially disadvantaged children. Ogletree and Ogletree found that most teachers did not believe Distar was effective with average or bright learners.

Another area of disagreement was the degree and frequency of modification or revision of the program. Some teachers modified a great deal while others adhered to the programmed instructions. Also, teachers were divided on whether Distar enhanced children's attention span. Although Bridgeport teachers found Distar increased the children's attention span, Ogletree and Ogletree found the opposite to be true.

Another point of controversy was on whether the children were bored with the repetition. Although the majority of

Bridgeport teachers, 78 percent, did not believe the children were bored, Ogletree and Dipasalegne (1975) reported that 72 percent of the Chicago teachers in their study believed the children did find Distar boring.

One other point of contention was concerned with whether teachers would like to teach another subject using Distar. Although Dipasalegne and Ogletree (1976) reported that Chicago teachers would not like to teach another subject using Distar, the majority of Bridgeport teachers said they would (47 percent versus 24 percent). It is noteworthy, however, that 29 percent of the Bridgeport teachers would not comment about that question, the question most teachers would not comment on. Ogletree and Dipasalegne (1975) also found the majority of teachers (57 percent) would use the approach in another subject area. On the other hand, Ogletree and Ogletree reported that only 23 percent of their Chicago teachers would like to teach another subject using the Distar method.

As one can surmise, opinions vary from one study to another. Teachers were in agreement about some parts of Distar and disagreed on others.

It was interesting to note, also, the great difference of opinion between teachers in a school system. For instance, when asked whether Distar stifled your (the teacher's) creativity, one Bridgeport teacher checked no three times to emphasize her point, and yet other teachers checked yes as their answer. This happened again with other questions. One teacher put two checks under yes to emphasize the point that she would like to use Distar along with other reading programs. On the other hand, ten teachers claimed they would not.

Conclusions

A summary of the findings as reported by Bridgeport, Connecticut, teachers is as follows:

1.) They like Distar.
2.) They like the highly structured format.
3.) Teachers feel confident when using Distar.
4.) Most children are readily learning the Distar materials.

5.) Distar Reading teaches word attack skills more effectively than comprehension skills.
6.) Sections of Distar Reading could be used in any class.
7.) The children like Distar and are not bored.
8.) A teacher-aide is necessary.
9.) Distar is not superior to other reading programs for all pupils, but it is for some.
10.) All learners, slow, average, or bright, can benefit from Distar Reading instruction but slow and average learners seem to benefit more.
11.) Distar enhances attention span.
12.) Teachers do not believe Distar stifles creativity.

My own comment is to emphatically state that no school system should use only one method of teaching reading, excluding other methods. I believe that some children learn better by a certain modality, whether it be visual, auditory, kinesthetic, or a combination, and should be taught by the method that best suits that child. That means that no one method can ever meet the needs of all students.

In addition to the information presented, teachers' suggestions and comments are submitted. I found most teachers were dissatisfied with the limited comprehension emphasis and desired more concentration on those skills. Secondly, teachers wanted more supplementary materials to go along with the system, such as films, maps, and other realia. Thirdly, many teachers were dissatisfied with Distar Reading 111. They suggested adding more word attack skills, phonics, syllabication, critical and inferential thinking, language skills, grammar, and so on. Many teachers complained that Distar 111 is too science-orientated and much too technical for slow learners, especially. The teachers indicated the children were most bored with this type of com-

plex, technical story content. Also, it was stated that so much emphasis on science limits the vocabulary introduced to the children. Most of the teachers commenting on Distar 111 claimed it needs to be revised. Some teachers enriched Distar Reading 111 with more creative activities to maintain understanding and interest. In addition, one teacher pointed out that feet and inches referred to in a story will be obsolete terms.

The last most expressed suggestion was to supplement Distar Reading with other reading methods and materials for bright children.

Other recommendations offered were to have at least two reading programs offered in every school to better meet individual needs, use Distar in other schools besides just disadvantaged ones, some stories which are too long and create boredom should be eliminated, eliminate clapping, and children should not have to respond together "like robots."

Although I agree with many of the suggestions, only one teacher made the following suggestion which I think is very important: drop sounding out of irregular words. That teacher also added the following comment:

> I have enjoyed teaching other methods more, however, I feel that the children learned better with Distar and for that reason I prefer to teach Distar.

This teacher has been a full-time teacher for ten years, six years have been teaching Distar Reading.

I think it would be appropriate to conclude by quoting another teacher who completed one of the questionnaires:

> I have worked with disadvantaged children for eleven years now. Since I have been using the Distar method of teaching reading, I have had no non-readers or children reading lower than one year behind grade level. I am speaking, of course, of children who have completed Level 1 and 11; not those who came to my school from other schools not having Distar. Of twenty children in my class this year in the

above-mentioned category, all twenty are prepared to begin the third grade program. Since Distar, I have also found fewer reluctant readers. In free time periods my children reach for a library book more frequently than in the past. They seem to have more confidence in their own reading ability.

Recommendations for Further Investigation

Since differences of opinion and findings have occurred in Distar research, I believe more research is needed. In particular, research should be conducted in the following areas:

1.) More longitudinal research is necessary examining Distar's effectiveness as compared to other methods of teaching reading.

2.) We need to examine more fully Distar's effectiveness with all types of learners.

3.) We need to examine more fully Distar's effectiveness in different socio-economic areas.

4.) We need to learn more about Distar's effectiveness with learning disabled and retarded children, and also children with language problems.

5.) We need to learn if Distar teaches comprehension skills adequately.

6.) A more national perspective of teachers' opinions of Distar would be desirable.

7.) You will remember that I listed several objections to the synthetic method of teaching phonetic analysis. Karlin advocates using the analytic method. It must be pointed out, however, that there have been objections to the analytic method also. For instance, Bliesmer and Yarborough [23] reported that of the ten reading programs used with 500 first grade pupils in the Chesapeake, Virginia, public schools, the five that gave attention to letter-

sound associations were significantly more productive in terms of specific reading achievement in grade one than were the so-called analytic programs that used the whole-word method. Since research is so limited in this area, I believe further research should be conducted comparing the effectiveness of synthetic versus analytic methodology.

Footnotes

(1) Robert Karlin, Teaching Elementary Reading (New York, 1975), p. 184.

(2) Earl J. Ogletree, "Evaluating the Reading Needs of Inner-City Kindergarten Pupils," The Journal of Educational Research, 71(Nov./Dec. 1977), p. 67. Also in ERIC, ED 146 303 (1977).

(3) Siegfried Engelmann, "Commentary," The Journal of Educational Research, 71 (Mar./Ap. 1978), pp. 238-9.

(4) Merle B. Gordon, Distar Instructional System: Summaries of Case Studies on the Effectiveness of Distar Instructional System (1971).

(5) A. Hanchett, "Performance of Three First-Grade Classes in San Mateo, California: Case Study No. 16 (August 1973)," Distar Instructional System: Summaries of Case Studies on the Effectiveness of Distar (1974).

(6) G. W. Knudson, "An Evaluation of a Preschool Program in Granite School District, Utah (August 1971)," Distar Instructional System: Summaries of Case Studies on the Effectiveness of Distar (1973).

(7) B. E. Anderson, "An Evaluative Study: Teaching Three- and Four-Year-Olds in a Structural Educational Program in Granite School District, Utah (August 1971)," Distar Instructional System: Summaries of Case Studies on the Effectiveness of Distar (1973).

(8) R. Aronson, "Achievement in Lowndes County Alabama: Case Study No. 19 (August 1972)," Distar Instructional System: Summaries of Case Studies on the Effectiveness of Distar (1973).

(9) D. Gross, Distar Instructional System: Summaries of Case Studies on the Effectiveness of the Distar Instructional System (Illinois, 1971).

(10) Juliet P. Borden and others, "Extended Positive Effects of a Comprehensive Head Start Follow Through Program Sequence on Academic Performance of Rural Disadvantaged Students," Journal of Negro Education, 44 (Spring 1975), pp. 149-60.

(11) Maurice Kaufman, "Comparison of Achievement For Distar And Conventional Instruction With Primary Pupils," Reading Improvement, 13 (Fall 1976), pp. 169-73.

(12) Ronald West Bruton, "Evaluation of Objectives of an Oral-Language Intervention Program," Elementary School Journal, 76 (Dec. 1975) pp. 170-80.

(13) David B. Ryckman, Rosemary Mc Cartin, Sam Sebesta, "Do Structured Reading Programs Hamper Intellectual Development?" Elementary School Journal, 77 (S. 1976), pp. 71-3.

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(15) J. A. Emrick and others, Interim evaluation of the national Follow Through program, 1969-71: A Technical report (California, 1973). In A. Harry Passow, "Compensatory Instructional Intervention," Review of Research in Education, ed. Fred N. Kerlinger (Illinois: 1974), p. 145.

(16) Lynne Guinet. Evaluation of Distar Materials in Three Junior Learning Assistance Classes (British Columbia, July 1971).

(17) Robert H. Leiss and Barton B. Proger, "Language Training for Trainable Mentally Retarded Children: ITPA, Peabody, and Distar Techniques," EC 10 0865 (Spring 1978), p. 127.

(18) Kathy La Tour, "More High Marks for the 3Rs." The National Observer (July 4, 1977).

(19) Earl J. Ogletree and Rosalee W. Dipasalegne, "Innercity Teachers evaluate Distar," Reading Teacher, 28 (April 1975), pp. 633-37.

(20) Rosalee W. Dipasalegne and Earl J. Ogletree, "An Assessment of Distar by Chicago Innercity Teachers," ERIC, ED 146 542, 1976.

(21) Earl J. Ogletree and Gerda S. Ogletree, "Teachers' Opinions of the Distar Reading Program," ERIC, ED 146 543, 1976.

Earl J. Ogletree and Gerda S. Ogletree, "Chicago Teachers' Evaluation of Distar for Innercity Pupils," ERIC, ED 146 304, 1977.

(22) J. A. Maillus, "An Evaluation of the Program of Distar Instruction in District 10, Chicago, Illinois (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, Northeastern Illinois University, 1974).

(23) Emery P. Bliesmer and Betty H. Yarborough, "A Comparison of Ten Different Beginning Reading Programs in First Grade", Phi Delta Kappan, February, 1965. Also, Jeanne Chall, Learning to Read: The Great Debate (New York: Mc Graw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 134.

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APPENDIX

Title:

Bridgeport Teachers Evaluate The

Distar Method of Teaching Reading.

Return to:

Margaret K. Gonsalves
Reading Supervisor

I am only asking teachers who have taught Distar for at least one full year to answer this questionnaire. Please answer this questionnaire with reference to last year's Distar reading experiences since it is too early in the year to answer for this year. Please answer for the 1977-1978 school year.

My name is Valerie Huydic. Last year, I did research on Distar as it is used in Bridgeport. This year, I am doing additional research as part of my graduate studies in reading at Southern Connecticut State College. I am doing this research with the cooperation of your principal and the Deputy Superintendent of Schools, James Curiale and Reading Supervisor, Margaret K. Gonsalves, who will use the information at a later date. I have included a questionnaire which may look long, but hopefully won't take you too long to fill out since I am asking you to only check the appropriate answer in most cases. The questionnaires are anonymously completed. I will personally come to talk to many of you at your convenience. Your principal will notify you of the day I will be in your school.

Some of you I have already met. It was a pleasure to talk to such dedicated, warm, and competent teachers. You have helped me in the past and I hope I can again count on your assistance. I greatly appreciate your effort and cooperation.

I will leave a large envelope in the principal's office. Would you please put your completed questionnaire in the envelope one week after you have received it? Please call me if you have any questions. I live in Trumbull. My phone number is 268-0154. Also, please call me if you would like a copy of the completed research study. Thank you so much. I hope I can help you one day.

Please answer all of the questions.

Introduction Questions

Although you may remain anonymous when you complete this questionaire, will you kindly answer these personal questions about your teaching? _

	Circle one		
1.	Did you have a teacher aide?	Yes	No
2.	Did you teach Distar reading everyday?	Yes	No
3.	Did you attend a training workshop in preparation for teaching Distar?	Yes	No
4.	Did you teach Distar math?	Yes	No
5.	Did you teach Distar language?	Yes	No
6.	If not, would you like to teach one or both of these subjects using the Distar method?	Yes	No

answers

7. How much time did you spend <u>per day per group</u> in Distar reading?
8. How many years have you taught Distar reading?
9. How many years have you taught reading by some other method?
10. How many years have you been a full-time teacher? (also indicate grades)
11. What is the average number of children in your groups for reading using Distar materials?
12. How many Distar reading groups did you have?

Answer the following three (3) questions only if they apply:

	Yes	No	No Comment
1. When I was teaching by a reading method other than Distar, children achieved just as well? more? less well?			
2. When I was teaching by a reading method other than Distar, children seemed more attentive?			
3. I have taught reading by another method besides Distar and I liked teaching by that method better.			

Valerie Huydic

Distar Questionnaire

	Please check one		
	Yes	No	No Comment
1. Do you believe culturally disadvantaged children need a structured, concrete approach to learning such as Distar?			
2. Do you believe culturally disadvantaged children like a structured, concrete approach to learning such as Distar?			
3. Have you found Distar to be successful with socially disadvantaged children?			
4. Do you believe Distar meets the needs of children for whom learning to read might be especially difficult?			
5. Do you find that the longer you teach Distar the better you like it?			
6. Do you find that the longer you teach Distar the less you like it?			
7. Did you believe Distar was effective with your class?			
8. Do you believe Distar reading is effective with average learners?			
9. Do you believe Distar reading is effective with bright learners?			

	Yes	No	No Comment
10. Do you believe Distar should be used <u>more</u> as a remedial reading system?			
11. Do you believe Distar is <u>just as</u> motivational to slow learners as average students?			
12. Do you believe Distar is <u>just as</u> motivational to slow learners as rapid, bright learners?			
13. Do you believe Distar saves time in preparation?			
14. Would you like to use Distar along with other reading programs?			
15. Did you use Distar along with other reading programs?			
16. If the choice was yours, would you like to teach another reading system and not teach Distar?			
17. Would you like to have <u>the option</u> of using another system and/or Distar?			
18. Are <u>most</u> of the basic word attack skills learned when using Distar?			
19. Do you believe the "Take-homes" were effective as motivational devices?			

	Yes	No	No Comment
20. Are the Distar tests valid measures of achievement of word attack skills?			
21. Are the Distar tests valid measures of reading comprehension?			
22. Does Distar reading teach enough comprehension skills?			
23. Do you feel you spent sufficient time with each group teaching Distar reading?			
24. Did you like teaching Distar reading?			
25. Did you believe most of your pupils liked Distar reading?			
26. Do you believe Distar stifles your creativity?			
27. Do you believe Distar stifles the children's creativity?			
28. Do you believe the attention span of the children is shorter when teaching Distar reading than when you teach other subjects such as science?			
29. Do you believe the children's attention span is better with Distar reading than with other subjects?			
30. Do you believe Distar is superior to other reading programs for all pupils? for some pupils?			

	Yes	No	No Comment
31. Do you believe slow learners liked Distar better than average students?			
32. Do you believe slow learners liked Distar better than bright students?			
33. Do you believe Distar could be used effectively in any classroom?			
34. Do you believe the children have difficulty making the transition from Distar print to regular print in reading?			
35. Do you deviate from the prescribed Distar method as outlined in your book?			
36. If yes, do you deviate from the programmed instruction of Distar quite a lot?			
37. Do you believe Distar is too structured?			
38. Do you believe most children were bored with the repetition?			
39. Did you modify or revise the Distar program daily?			
40. Did you modify or revise the Distar program occasionally?			
41. Did you think Distar was boring to teach?			

	Yes	No	No Comment
42. Did you think there was ample drill?			
43. Did you supplement the written work provided by Distar?			
44. Did you skip lessons with some pupils?			
45. Do you believe the illustrations and story content were appealing to the children?			
46. Did you feel confident using Distar?			
47. Do you believe a teacher aide is <u>necessary</u> to effectively teach Distar?			
48. Was your training adequate preparation for you to teach Distar effectively?			

49. Underline what part of the Distar program you modified or revised (if you did):

format, hand signals, materials, "Take-Homes"

50. I believe I can be (Choose only <u>one</u>: more, less, the same) humanistic when I teach using Distar than I can when I am not using Distar and teaching in the conventional manner. By humanistic I mean that you do feel like you have good communication with each student and are usually attuned to all of his individual needs, not just the educational ones.

Comment only if you care to:

Do you have any suggestions on how to improve Distar reading?

You may use this space to comment on or explain any of the preceding questions. Please indicate the question you are referring to.